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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains 10 success stories of Pennsylvania men and women who discovered adult education programs that gave them the tools to create a new life for themselves and their families. Their stories affirm the ability of each adult to use education to overcome great difficulties. Some overcame physical and learning disabilities. Some survived child abuse, abandonment, and prejudice. Some conquered drug and alcohol abuse. All had the personal courage to work hard to change their lives, with the help of education programs in their communities. The stories also show that education has value beyond a paycheck: for these men and women education has meant a greater sense of their own worth and potential. (The booklet is illustrated with photographs of the 10 persons selected to be honored as outstanding adult students.) (KC)

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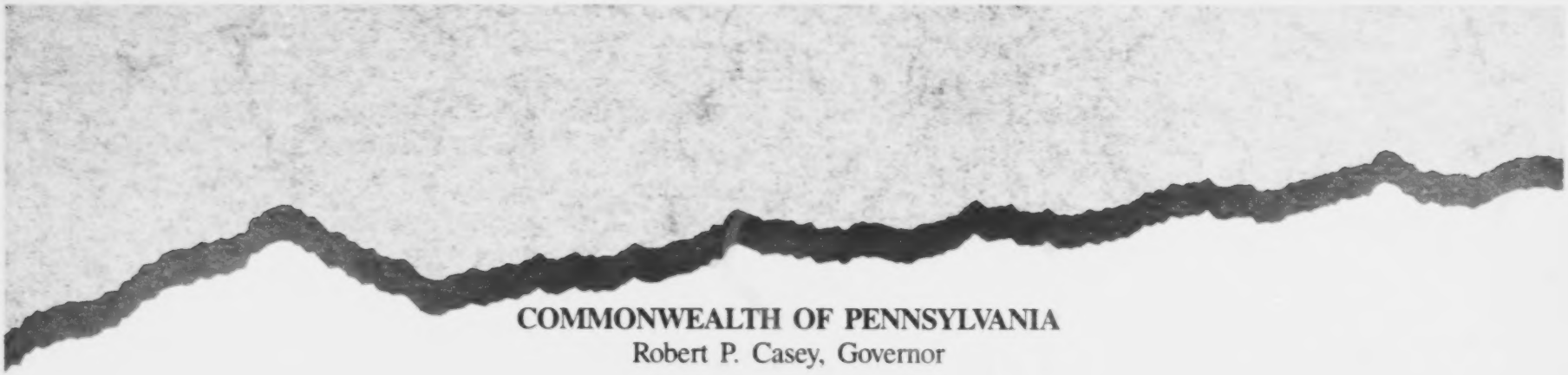

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PDE Division of Adult Basic and
Literacy Education Programs

1989
A • NEW
BEGINNING

Dear Reader,

In ***SUCCESS STORIES: A New Beginning***, you will meet ten outstanding Pennsylvania men and women who discovered adult education programs that gave them the tools to create a new life for themselves and their families. Their stories affirm the ability of each adult to use education to overcome great difficulties.

Some overcame physical and learning disabilities. Some survived child abuse, abandonment and prejudice. Some conquered drug and alcohol abuse. And each had the personal courage to work hard to change their lives, with the help of education programs in their communities.

This administration and the General Assembly have more than tripled state funds for adult literacy programs during the past two years. These stories show how the investment is already showing a return.

We often talk about education as a means to obtain jobs. These stories also remind us that education has value beyond a paycheck. For these men and women — and thousands more like them — education has given them a greater sense of their own worth and potential. They have new confidence in their abilities and new abilities to match their confidence.

I hope you find this booklet as inspirational as I did, and I ask you to join us in supporting adult literacy programs. If you know someone who can't read well, read them these stories and encourage them to join an adult education program. If you have time to volunteer to teach adult learners, contact your local public library or literacy council; they can train you.

With your help, we can create many more success stories like these.

Sincerely,

Robert Casey

Robert P. Casey
Governor,
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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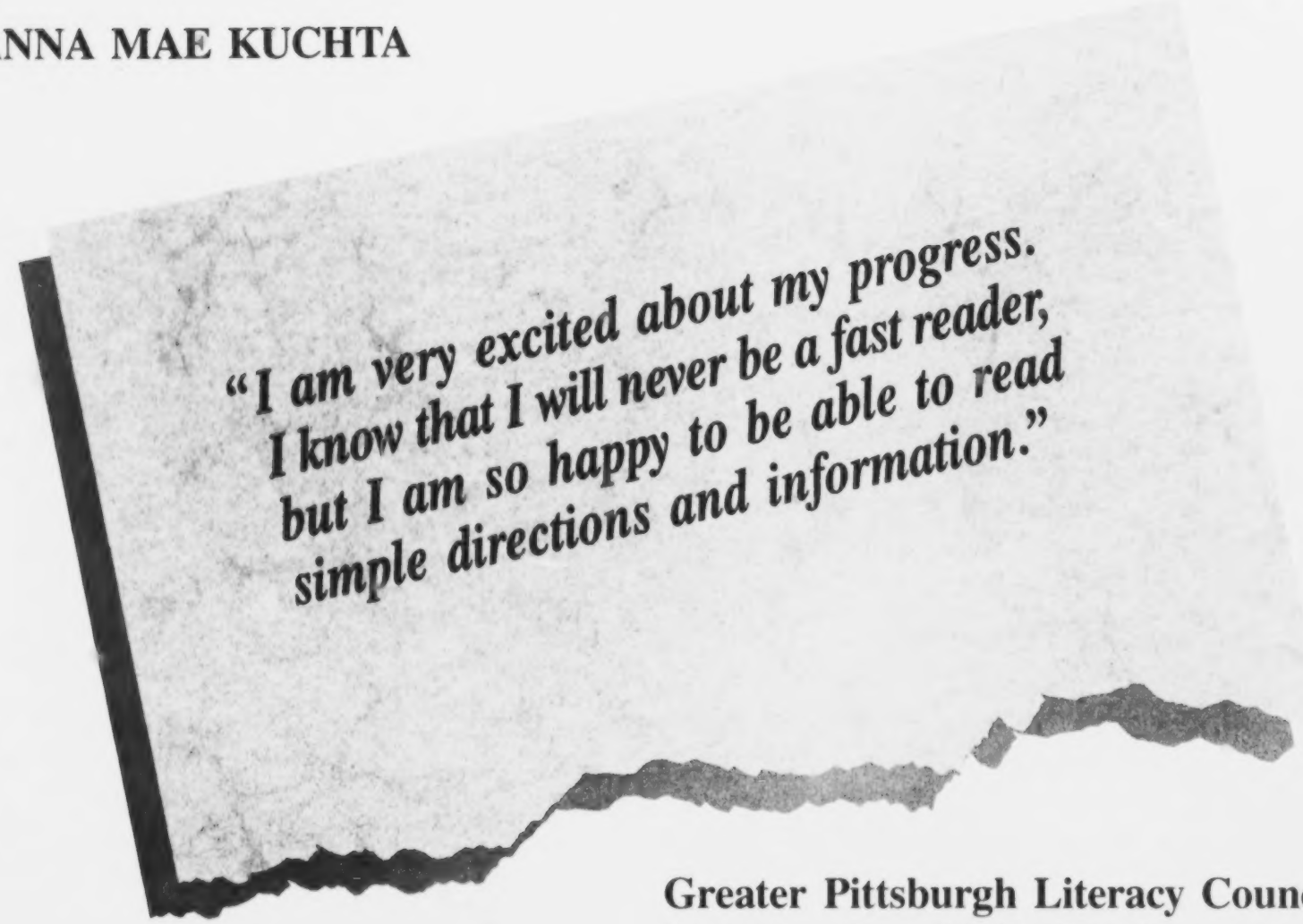
ANNA MAE KUCHTA


"I am very excited about my progress.
I know that I will never be a fast reader,
but I am so happy to be able to read
simple directions and information."

Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council
Sponsor: Donald G. Block

Anna Mae Kuchta has represented literacy students at student recognition events, the United Way's task force on literacy, a national conference and a visit to Barbara Bush. She filmed a segment for the Job Help program and was honored locally with an award given by Atlantic Book Stores for outstanding literacy students.

The enthusiasm and confidence that enables her to serve as a role model for adult learners is a very recent development. Beginning in first grade, she had trouble with reading. After failing first and second grade, school authorities asked her mother to enroll her in a school sensitive to students with learning problems. As a result, at age eight, Anna Mae was sent to a boarding school designed to meet the needs of mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed children.

From the first day, she felt different from the others. She could dress and feed herself and she wanted to learn to read. During her eight years at that school, she was drilled occasionally in the same first grade reader, but there was no progress. She was kept busy helping other children dress and bathe. One teacher took the time to teach her some survival math skills which would help her in later life.

When Anna Mae left school at sixteen, she wanted her independence but found it very difficult to convince her family she was competent enough to go out on her own. Her first chance came through a friend who worked on a tray line at a hospital. The friend introduced her to a hospital administrator who told Anna Mae she would try her out for a week without pay and then make a decision. After one day, she was hired, with pay, and proved her ability.

In August of 1986, Anna Mae heard about the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council's Project Learn, held at the Brashear Association, and summoned up the courage to enroll. Through this program, Anna Mae has learned to understand and compensate for her learning disability. No longer feeling guilty for her reading performance, she sees her life goal in terms of a series of small steps leading from literacy to a GED to an associate degree in social work. She understands the concept of independence, making decisions and setting realistic goals.

Anna Mae shares her commitment to improving life with others by participating in support activities offered by the literacy council. She serves as part of the tutor training effort, edits the student newspaper and counsels new and existing students. In 1987, she founded a support group for literacy students which meets twice a month. Her enthusiasm and encouragement maintain it. She says, "It was important for me to know that I was not alone in this program. I thought other people would like to share their experiences too."

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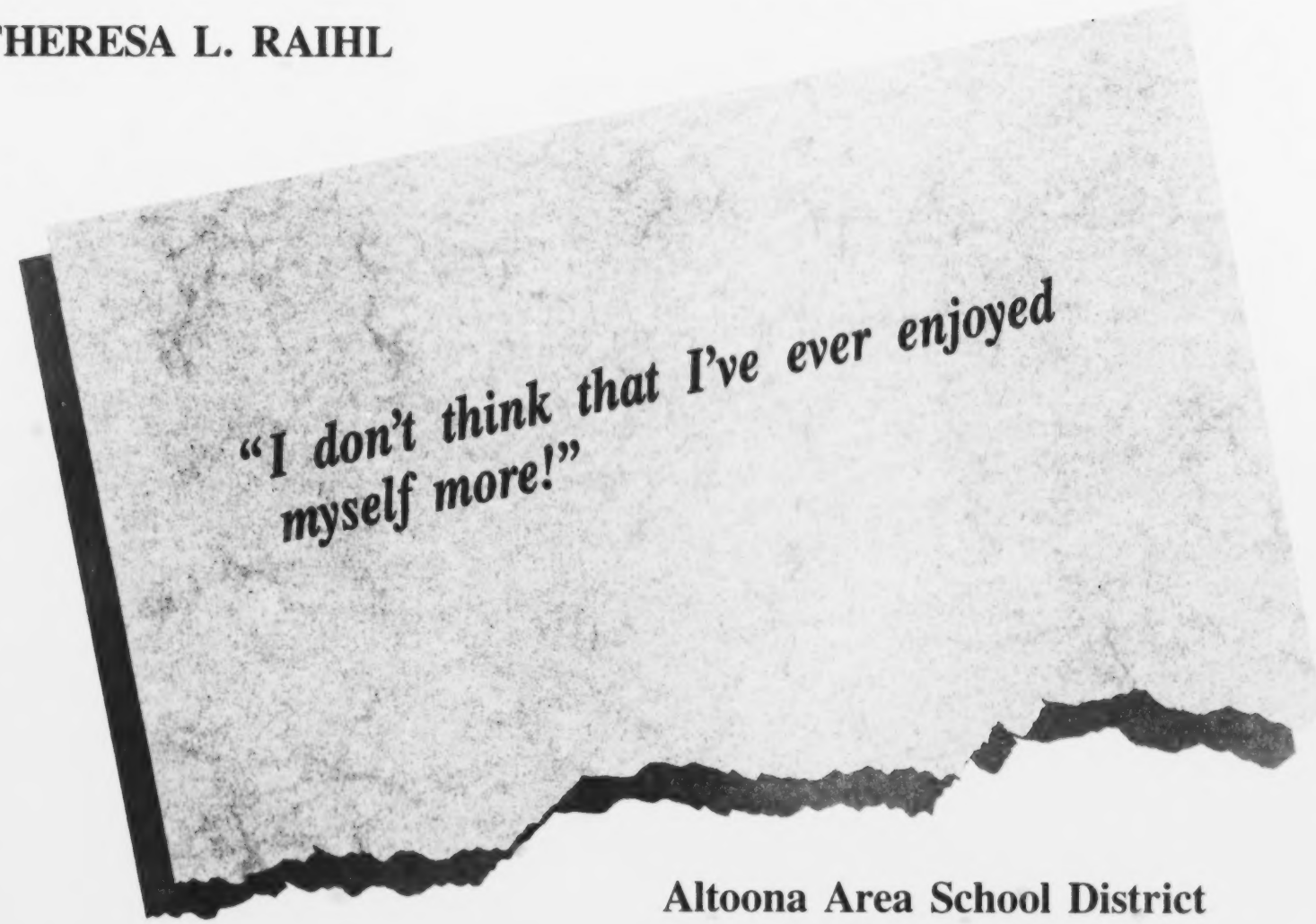
THERESA L. RAIHL



Altoona Area School District
Sponsor: Gerald Valeri

A college student, secretary of the Advisory Council for Domestic Abuse, and a trained adult literacy volunteer, Theresa Raihl has come a long way from that day in 1978 when she entered the Altoona Domestic Abuse Shelter. Then, divorced and living in an abusive relationship, she lacked the high school diploma and the skills to make a living for herself and her children.

As a teen parent, Theresa left school in the tenth grade. In the next decade, she had four children, now ages nine through seventeen. Upon her divorce, she entered a relationship that turned out to be life threatening. In 1978, at the lowest point in her life, she and the children fled to the local Domestic Abuse Shelter.

The counseling and network of support agencies that assist the shelter residents went into motion. In Theresa's case, they enabled her to acquire the skills and self-confidence to remake her life. The Department of Welfare provided cash assistance and Aid to Families with Dependent Children provided funds while she was at the center. She was referred to the Altoona Area School District's adult education GED program. When she enrolled in the GED class, her counselor referred her to a vocational dislocated homemaker program. This program, called PROJECT CHANGE, offered her the career counseling she needed to make a responsible decision about her future.

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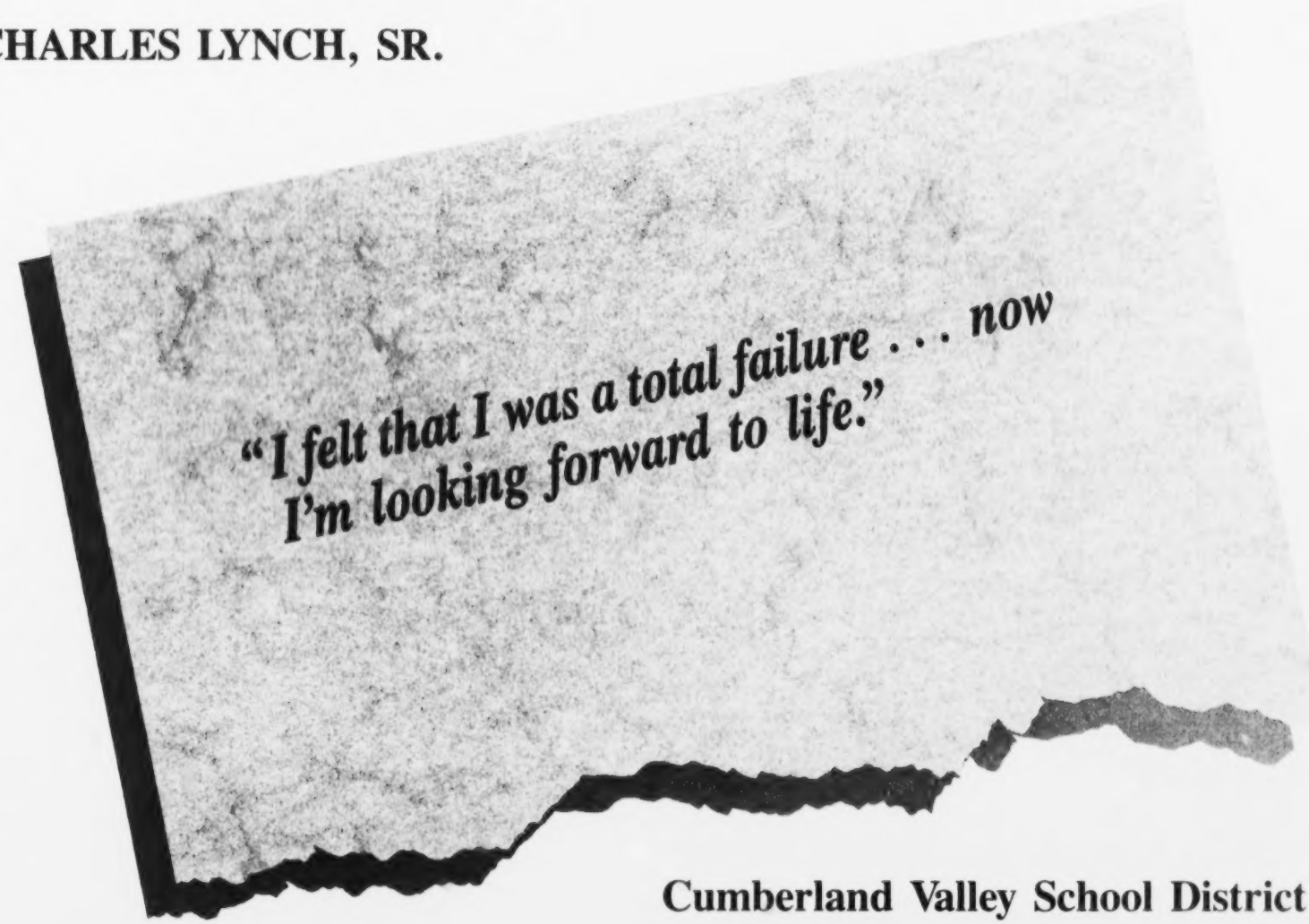
In the fall of 1988, upon completing her GED, she enrolled in the Individual Family Studies degree program at the Pennsylvania State University. After successfully completing six credits of undergraduate work as a provisional student, her status has been changed to that of full time student. Theresa is looking forward to graduating in 1991. She plans to return to work in the community as a counselor, to "repay all those who helped me on my way."

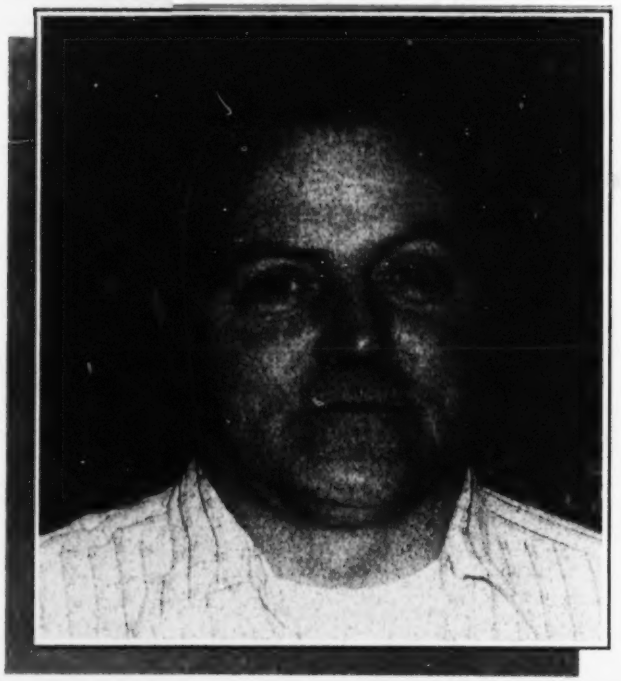
Theresa exemplifies GED graduates who, upon receiving their diplomas, are determined to become contributing members of society. She is both determined and articulate. She currently serves as secretary of the Advisory Council for Domestic Abuse. As her nine year old son is deaf, she has become very involved with the Advocates for the Deaf.

She also serves as a volunteer at the Domestic Abuse Shelter and was presented with their "Volunteer of the Year Award 1987." Theresa works as a trained, active volunteer adult literacy tutor at the Altoona Adult Education Center. This emphasis on the importance of getting an education as well as her active interest in her children's school work has paid off. Theresa's fifteen year old daughter is an Advanced Placement honor society student.

CHARLES LYNCH, SR.



Cumberland Valley School District
Sponsor: Samuel Gruber and
Central Pennsylvania Literacy Council
Sponsor: Nan Cavenaugh



Charles Lynch, Sr. left school in eleventh grade, unable to read above first grade level. Like many functional illiterates of the early sixties, he had been placed in special education classes. He was discouraged with his lack of progress and used the excuse of his mother's illness and family problems to escape a "no-win" situation. Charles was ill prepared to face the future. He dreaded and tried to avoid any situation where he would need to read. It took him over a year just to memorize the information required to pass the written driver's exam. For twenty years, this inability to read has embarrassed him and cost him numerous jobs and opportunities for advancement.

In the fall of 1986, while working as a custodian for the Cumberland Valley School District, Charles heard about the local adult program and sought help from an administrator he knew. After listening to his difficulties, the administrator contacted the Cumberland County Literacy Council and Charles was assigned a tutor. Charles worked the evening shift at the high school and, instead of going to dinner, he would meet his tutor for reading instruction. When they began working together, he was reading at about a third grade level.

After two years of hard work, Charles can now read at high school level. He has learned to enjoy different kinds of reading, from James Thurber to Reader's Digest to Greek Tragedy. In September 1987, he entered the school district's competency-based high school diploma program. Through tremendous effort, he managed to complete all the requirements of this program, continue his tutoring, and work full-time. On June 6, 1988, he received a district high school diploma.

The ability to read and receive a high school diploma has improved his confidence, his self-concept, and his life. Charles has excellent mechanical skills but previously would not apply for any mechanic's position because he could not read technical manuals. Recently, he got a job as a mechanic at a local automobile dealership, increasing his earnings from $3.25 to $8.50 an hour. Now he can read complex service manuals. He was recently chosen by his employer to attend a General Motors course on transmissions and is confident that he has the academic skills needed to be successful.

An active supporter of both the school district's adult education program and the local literacy council, Charles is happy to be recognized and share his successes with others. He is looking forward to taking a computer programming course at the high school. As busy as he is, he still finds time to give to his church and serves as superintendent of their Sunday School.

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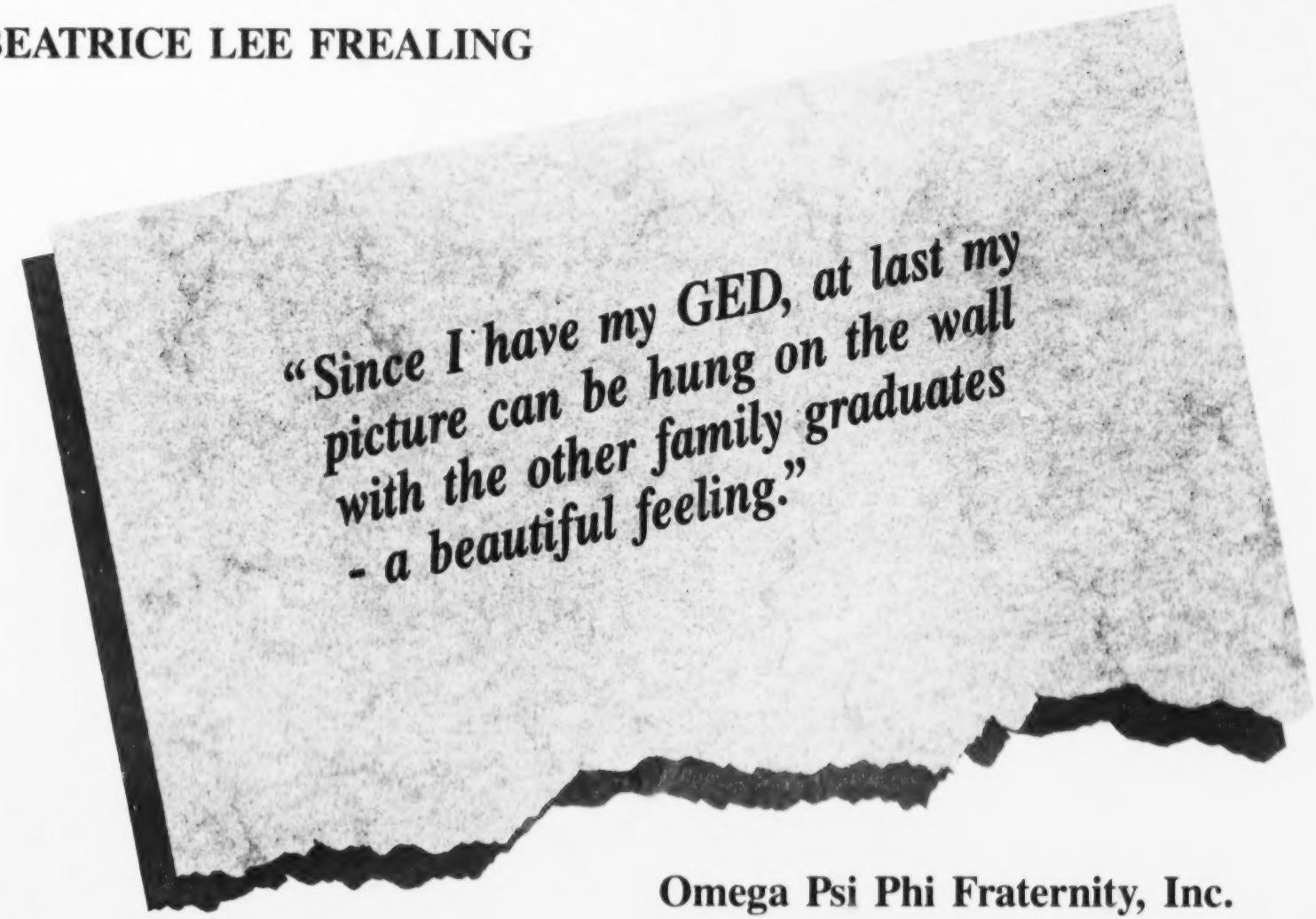
BEATRICE LEE FREALING



Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.
Sponsor: Robert T. Adams

Beatrice Lee Frealing was raised in a home where education was valued, though unattainable. Black children were not allowed to attend public school in the small town of Emmettsburg, Maryland. The Catholic Schools did provide one classroom for blacks run by the Sisters of Charity. There was just one problem. Whenever a new child entered the class, everyone was put back into first grade. When the new student could move on to second grade, everyone else was promoted too.

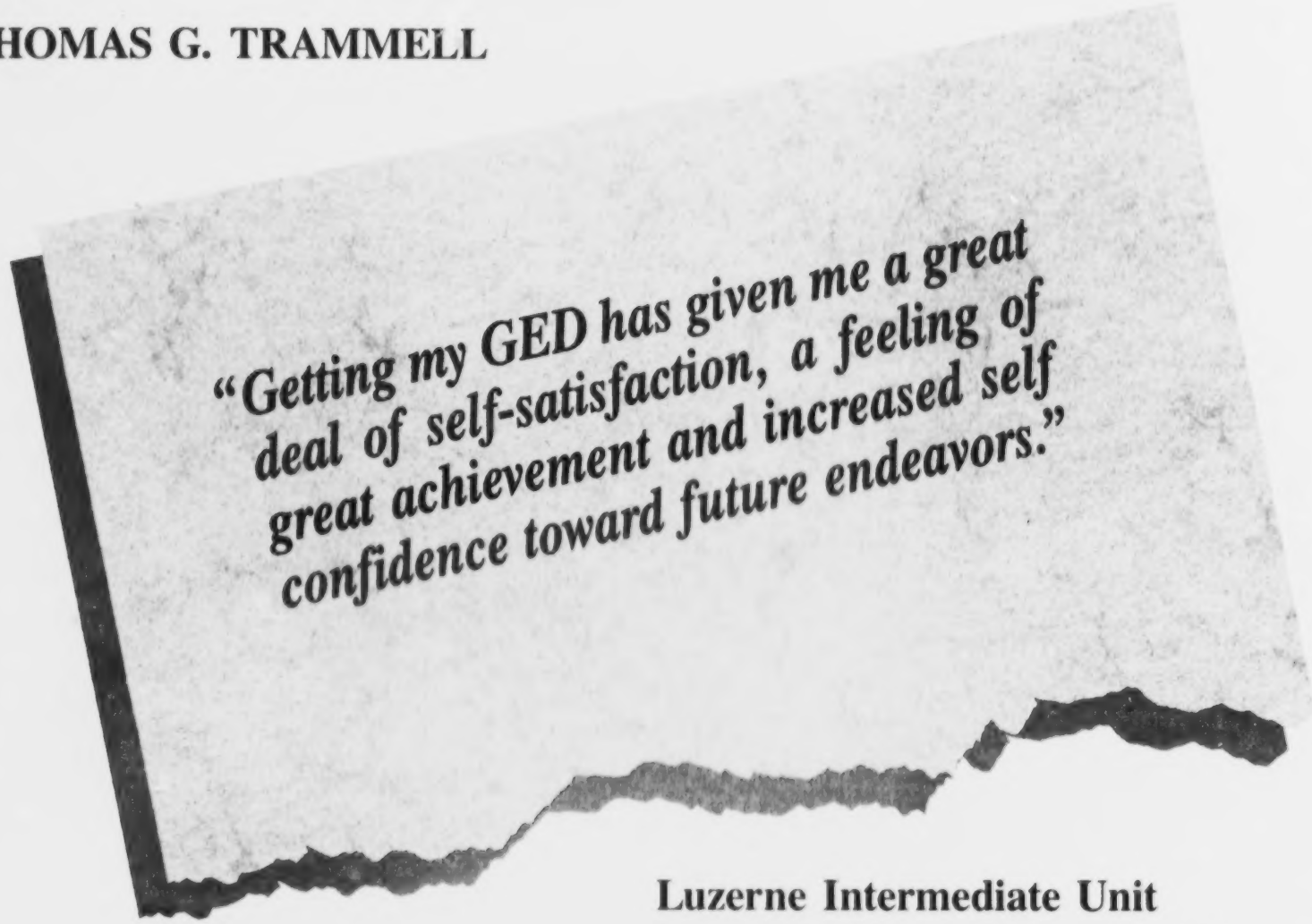
After eight years in that school, Beatrice's mother enlisted the aid of the Sisters to help secure a position for Beatrice and her older sister in a boarding school in Baltimore. High school for blacks was unheard of in their town. That boarding school turned out to be a home for orphan children. When the girls were not allowed home for Christmas, Beatrice's mother reclaimed them. She then made plans for them to travel eight miles north of their home to attend high school in Gettysburg. But when they tried to enroll in Gettysburg High School, Pennsylvania authorities refused to educate Maryland residents.

When Beatrice was fourteen, her mother had a heart attack and the two older girls found work as domestics to support the family. When their mother died the next year, the girls moved their three brothers and sisters to Pennsylvania where they could secure better domestic positions.

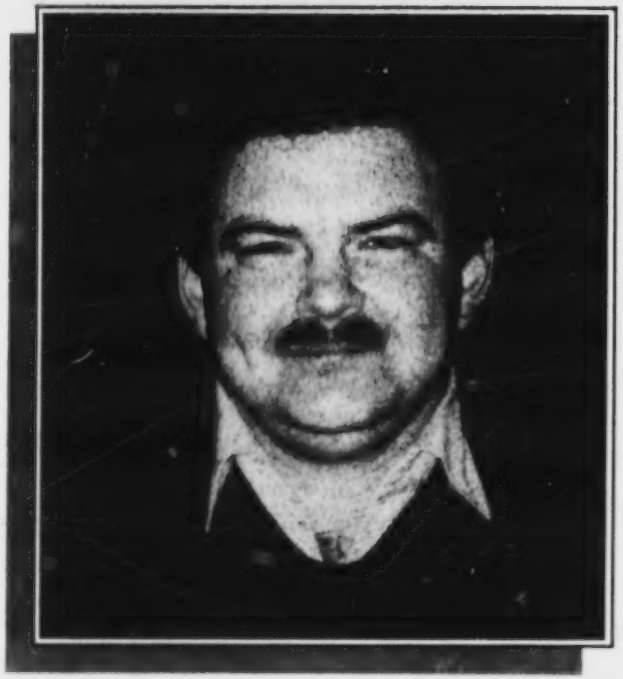
Beatrice married and had four daughters and a son. Her husband held an excellent government position and made a very good living. Until recently, he saw absolutely no reason to support her desire for more education. By working long, hard hours, first as a domestic, then as a nurse's aide, Beatrice earned enough to give her children all the educational benefits she had wanted — music lessons, international travel and a college education. Her son now works in industry, while her daughters hold professional jobs as a college teacher, a nurse, an attorney, and a legislative assistant.

After her children were on their own, Beatrice entered a local GED program, but failed the test. In February 1988, she enrolled in a small, individualized, tutoring program run by the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. She was determined to do better this time. Every Saturday for six months, she drove the 100-mile round trip from her home in Gettysburg to the class in Harrisburg. In July 1988, she was rewarded by passing the GED test. Beatrice is currently evaluating which course of study to pursue in college. She has always devoted herself to helping people and so is leaning toward a degree in Social and/or Human Development.

THOMAS G. TRAMMELL


"Getting my GED has given me a great deal of self-satisfaction, a feeling of great achievement and increased self confidence toward future endeavors."

Luzerne Intermediate Unit
Sponsors: Frank Nardone and Frank Wascalis



When Thomas G. Trammell was in tenth grade, his father needed an operation to repair a back injury. Tom's part-time job just wasn't providing enough money. In addition, he was having trouble with reading and math. He decided to leave school, work full time and contribute to the family income. Fifteen years later, Tom had to face up to the consequences of that decision. Injured on the job, with little chance of ever doing manual labor again, he realized that he would have to complete his education to become employable.

In February 1987, when Tom entered the adult literacy program run by Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18, his math skills were at third grade level and his reading at about fourth. He also had physical and emotional problems to deal with. He was often in severe pain because of his injury and received therapy weekly. Because of his loss of income, his wife left him. Tom was very upset about losing contact with his four year old son. Due to unemployment, he had to swallow his pride and go on public assistance. He felt that he was at the lowest point in his life.

Tom's attendance in the Literacy Program was almost perfect. He missed only one day out of forty-eight, despite the fact that he was in constant pain due to his back injury. The pain made it very difficult for him to concentrate but Tom worked very hard and managed to increase his reading by four grade levels. He feels a great sense of pride and accomplishment in being able to read story books to his son.

Though it required three attempts, Tom finally passed the GED test. After he received his GED, Tom began sending out job applications, a task he had formerly been unable to do without assistance. He was hired as a pizza maker by Januzzi's Pizza in West Hazleton. After a few months, his determination, reliability and sincerity began to pay off. He was promoted to assistant manager. Today, he is manager of the branch, in charge of hiring, handling all money and ordering supplies.

Tom's goal is to continue improving his reading. He is determined to attend a community college to pursue an associate degree in Business Administration. He remains a strong proponent of Adult Literacy Programs. Realizing the extent of his accomplishment, he encourages others to return to school to complete their education. He has taken an active interest in helping to set up a GED alumni association. In fact, in one corner of the pizza shop, there is a display with adult education literature and posters advertising adult education classes.

1989

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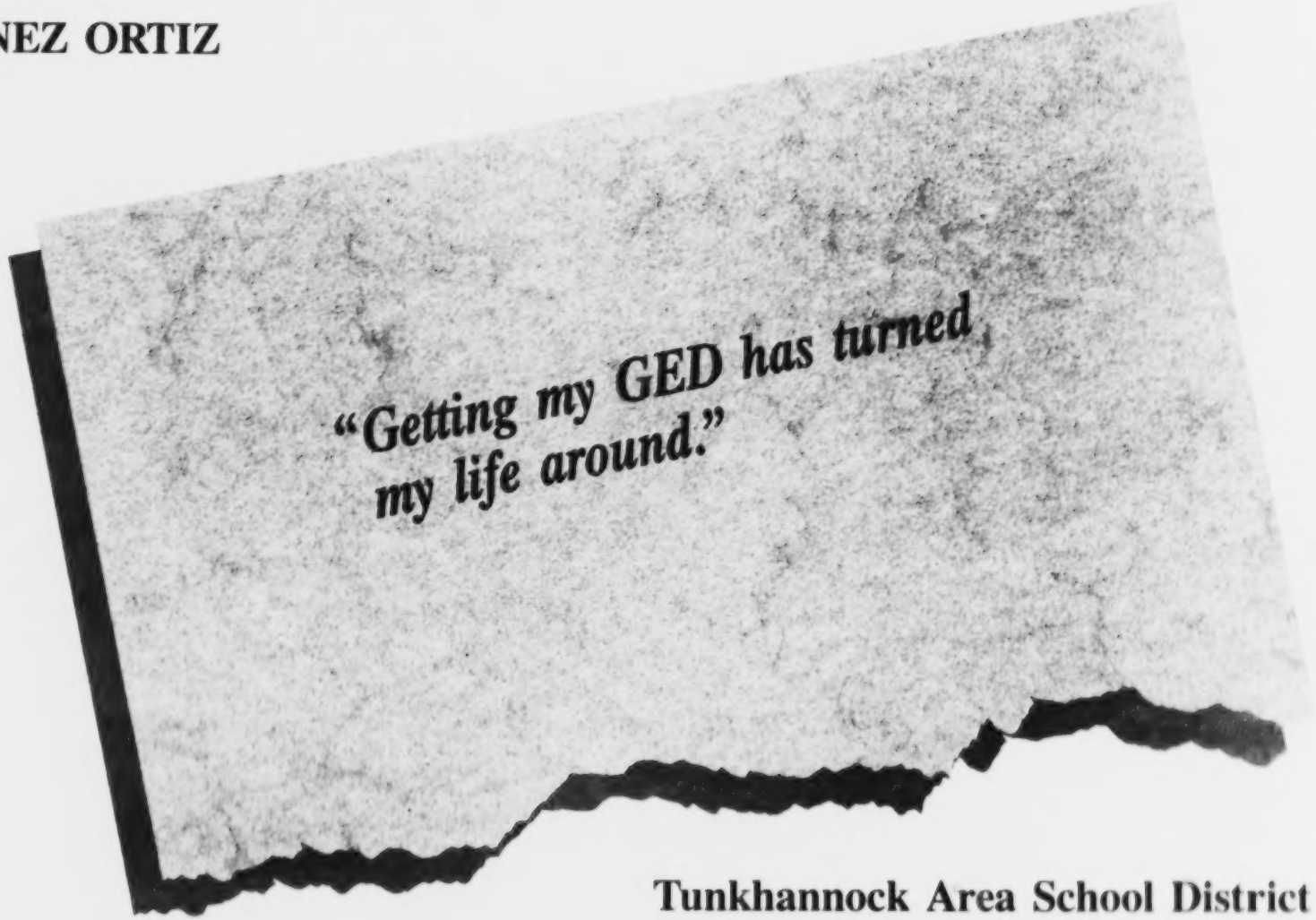
INEZ ORTIZ



Tunkhannock Area School District
Sponsor: Terri O'Dea

Inez Ortiz did not have a happy childhood. Her father frequently left home, sometimes for a year or two. The family was often on public assistance. The only girl of four children, she was ignored and picked on by her brothers. At six, she was abused by a neighbor. Her mother's way of dealing with this was to insist she tell no one, not even her father. This constant chaos, compounded by a bout with meningitis, affected her concentration in school. At thirteen, her father withdrew her from school, telling the authorities the family was moving. They did not relocate, but Inez did not return to school. Instead, she took over the household chores.

Involvement with drugs is common among inner city children. When Inez was twelve, she started sampling alcohol. At sixteen, a relationship with a married man resulted in her introduction to substance abuse. At seventeen, her parents told her to leave home. Her marriage at eighteen lasted only two years.

Realizing her desperate situation, she enrolled in a drug and alcohol program; enduring the terrible physical illness associated with detoxification because of her determination to change her life. To escape the inner city's drug environment, she moved her family to rural Pennsylvania. Now, at twenty-nine, she has been free of all substances for more than seven years. She credits this to her faith and trust in God's healing powers and a devoted commitment to her four children.

Inez's limited education was an obstacle to employment. So, in June 1987, she enrolled in the Bradford-Wyoming County Literacy Program. Amazed when her reading level went from third to sixth grade in three months, she entered the Tunkhannock ABE program, October 1987. As a single parent, she had babysitting problems. She also had to pass a driving test before she could borrow a car to go to class. Even though she had to travel twenty-four miles round trip on rural roads, she missed only two classes; when the back roads were closed by snow drifts and when her four year old had pneumonia. In May 1988, she passed the GED test.

Inez is now taking college classes financed by Single Point of Contact (S.P.O.C.), a government program to help single parents get off welfare. She hopes to complete the courses necessary for acceptance into an LPN course, pass the entrance examination and, in September 1989, enroll in the fifteen-month program. Her long range goal is to return to school for her R.N., with a speciality in pediatric nursing.

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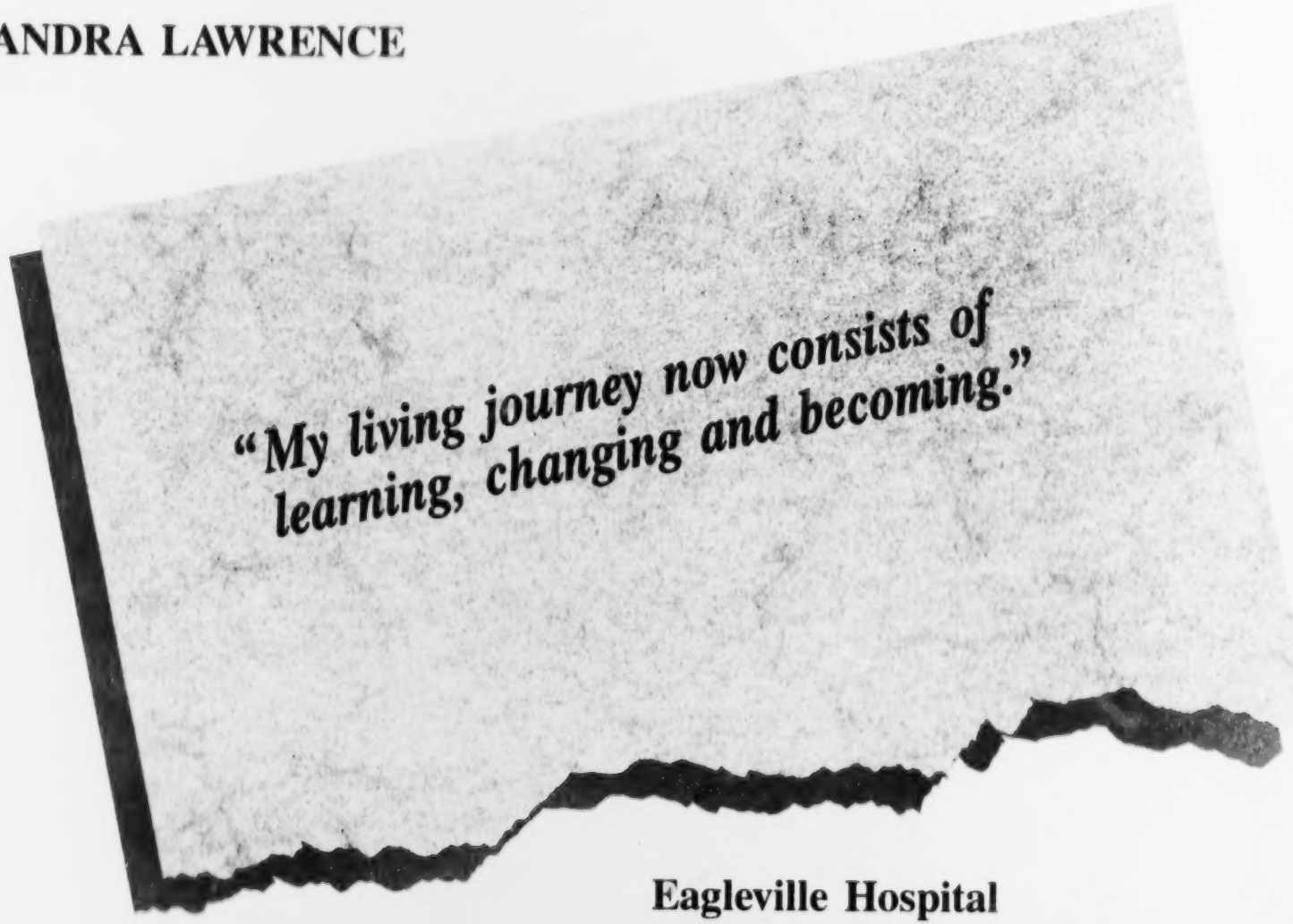
SANDRA LAWRENCE



Eagleville Hospital
Sponsor: Kathleen Marks

Once abandoned, abused, addicted and ambitionless, Sandra Lawrence now works full-time as a travel agent, planning corporate and group travel. She also helps out part-time in a New Hope crafts shop, hoping to learn more about the crafts she sells.

The mother of four children, Sandy is in her first year at Montgomery Community College. She is working toward an associate degree in Physical Education. Her next goal is to attend a college in Seattle, Washington, which offers a bachelor's degree in Holistic Health. Toward that end, she is training to be an aerobics instructor at a fitness center associated with Montgomery Hospital.

Looking at this busy career woman, it is hard to envision her past. Abandoned at two, farmed out from home to home, Sandy was thrown out of an Institute for Girls at fifteen. Pregnant at nineteen, she married and had four children in five years. Her husband, an alcoholic and drug dealer, abused her. She took to drugs as a solution to her pain and years of rejection.

By the late 1970s, Sandy was divorced and laden with financial burdens. Her life was out of control. She was found wandering the streets by the police and hospitalized briefly. She had several car accidents, dislocating her knee in one and fracturing both ankles, her skull and sternum in another. Because of her extensive drug history, she lost her work, friends, and family support.

In August 1986, her daughter brought Sandy to Eagleville Hospital. There, as part of her treatment, she attended GED classes. Unsure of herself, she would question, question, question and then absorb like a sponge. Her biggest obstacle, was her poor self-image. She saw herself differently when she received her GED diploma, September 1986. Five months later, she left the program with a future - her sobriety, her GED, a job and hope.

Now forty-four, Sandy enjoys her work at the travel agency and is looking forward to planning a tour for a Narcotics Anonymous convention next July. Education helped her realize people do care and that she has a future. Sandy is now reaching out and influencing others. She is an active member of a college support group for older people returning to school. She speaks to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups whenever she is sought out and is currently sponsoring two recovering women. "AA is my social life," she says. Three of her four children are back in school, one in college and two in night school. They see her as a role model and are proud of her.

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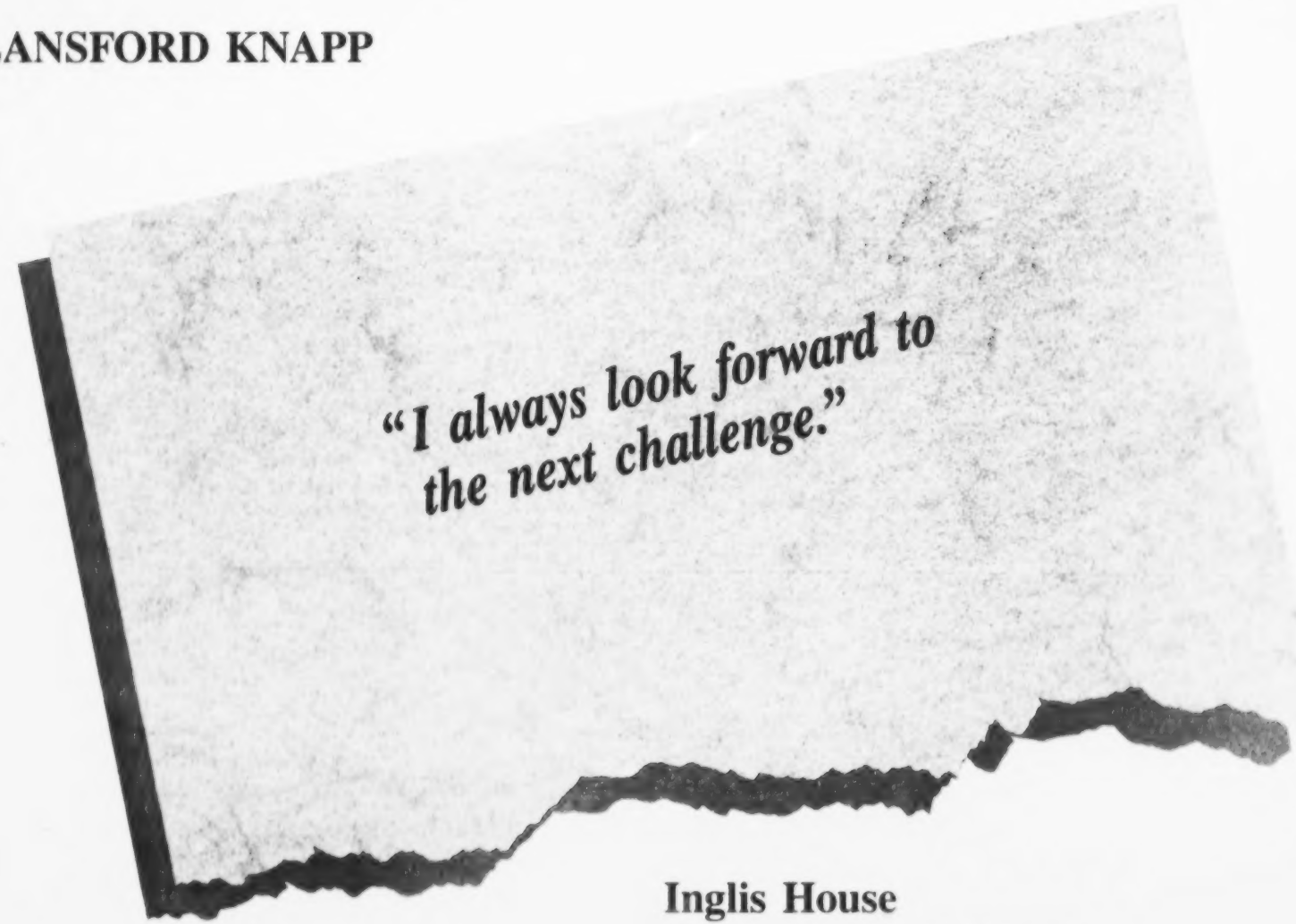
LANSFORD KNAPP



Inglis House
Sponsor: Mark Silver

Confined to a wheelchair, his physical movement restricted, Lansford Knapp has struggled all his life to overcome the difficulties caused by muscular dystrophy. Lanny attended a school for the physically disabled until the tenth grade, when health problems caused him to leave. Although he received home tutoring, it was not consistent or thorough enough for him to earn a high school diploma or a GED.

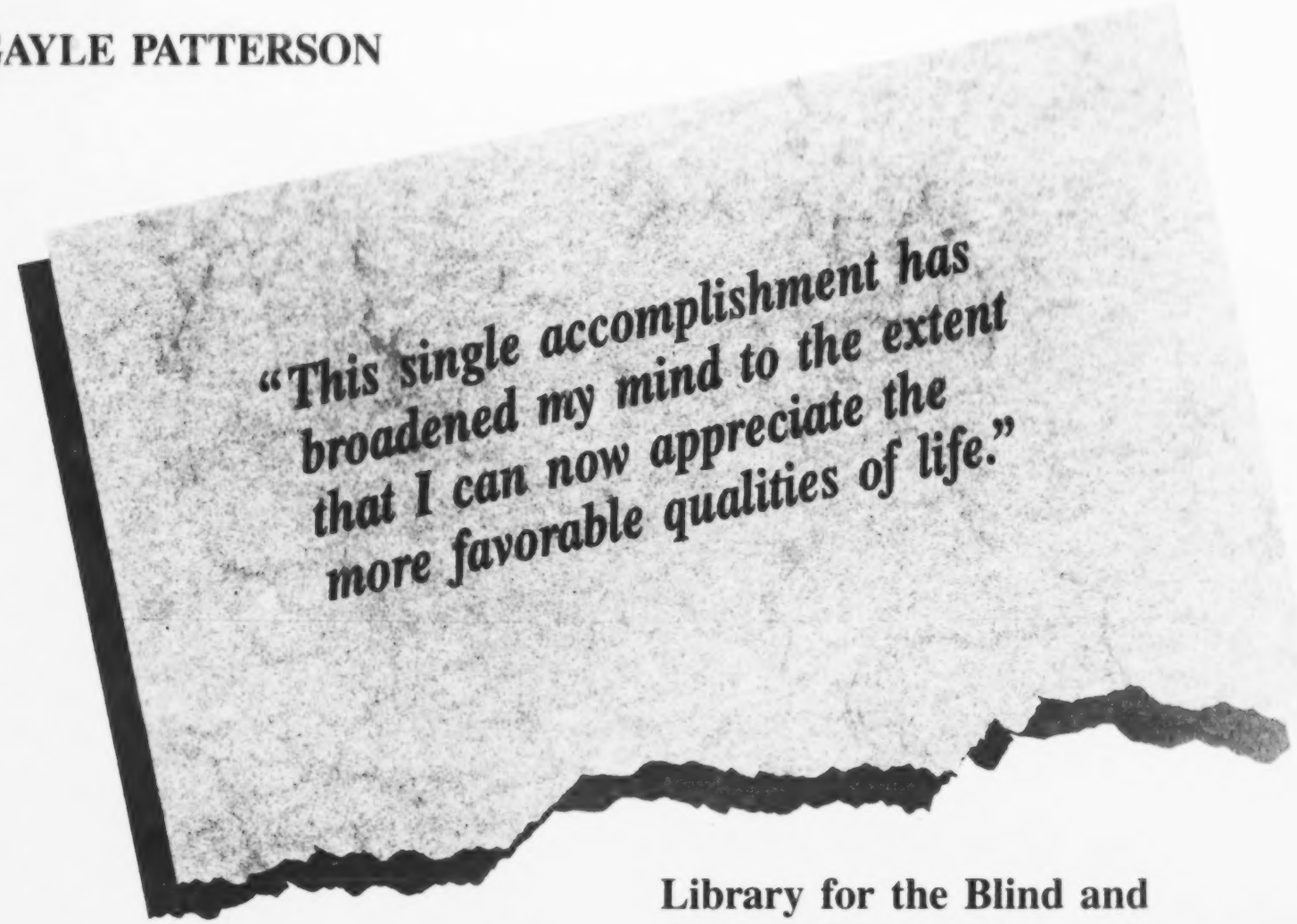
He enrolled in a rehabilitation program and acquired skills in the field of electronics. Blessed with a keen eye and a fine aptitude for mechanics, he developed his motor dexterity to its utmost and was hired as a maintenance man, repairing heating unit elements and air-conditioners. When Lanny moved to Pennsylvania in the late 1970's, he was hired by an instrument company to assemble and solder power supplies and control circuits. When cutbacks came in 1980, he lost his job.

In 1983, he was faced with multiple health problems, such as arthritis, frequent and severe winter colds, and debilitating emphysema, as well as MD. Realizing that his mother's back problems and cardiac condition made caring for him nearly impossible, Lanny became a resident of Inglis House, a Philadelphia home for disabled persons. There, he began GED studies and, in little more than a year, earned his GED, with a 276, well over the minimum score in every section. In 1986, he enrolled in a General Studies program offered in the Home through a joint venture with a community college.

In 1987, when the Home purchased computers, Lanny really found his niche. Each weekend and two nights a week, he tutors other students. He helps to maintain the computer equipment and has learned about adaptive devices used to help the disabled use computers. Lanny has maintained a 3.6 grade average. He hopes to graduate with honors in Data Processing and regain full-time employment.

Lanny joined the Home's Ham Radio Club and earned licenses at various levels. As a ham radio operator, he helps keep lines of communication open in times of crisis. During the Mexican earthquake and the Jamaican hurricane, he enabled people in his community to contact family in those stricken areas. Lanny serves on the Home's Resident Council, acting as an advocate for residents and advisors. He also delivers the mail. For some residents, this is their one personal contact with people and concerns inside the house. In all these activities, Lanny has overcome vast difficulties in health in order to succeed academically and as a person.

GAYLE PATTERSON


"This single accomplishment has broadened my mind to the extent that I can now appreciate the more favorable qualities of life."

Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
Sponsor: Alysia Zee

Gayle Patterson remembers a home terrorized by an abusive, alcoholic father. The middle child among five children, she was expected to come home right after school to cook, clean and tend to the household chores. Under this kind of pressure, she left school, even though she was a good student. At seventeen, overwhelmed by responsibilities and torn by divided loyalties, she ran away from home. Later that year, Gayle became a mother. Married at eighteen, she worked at part-time jobs while raising a family of four.

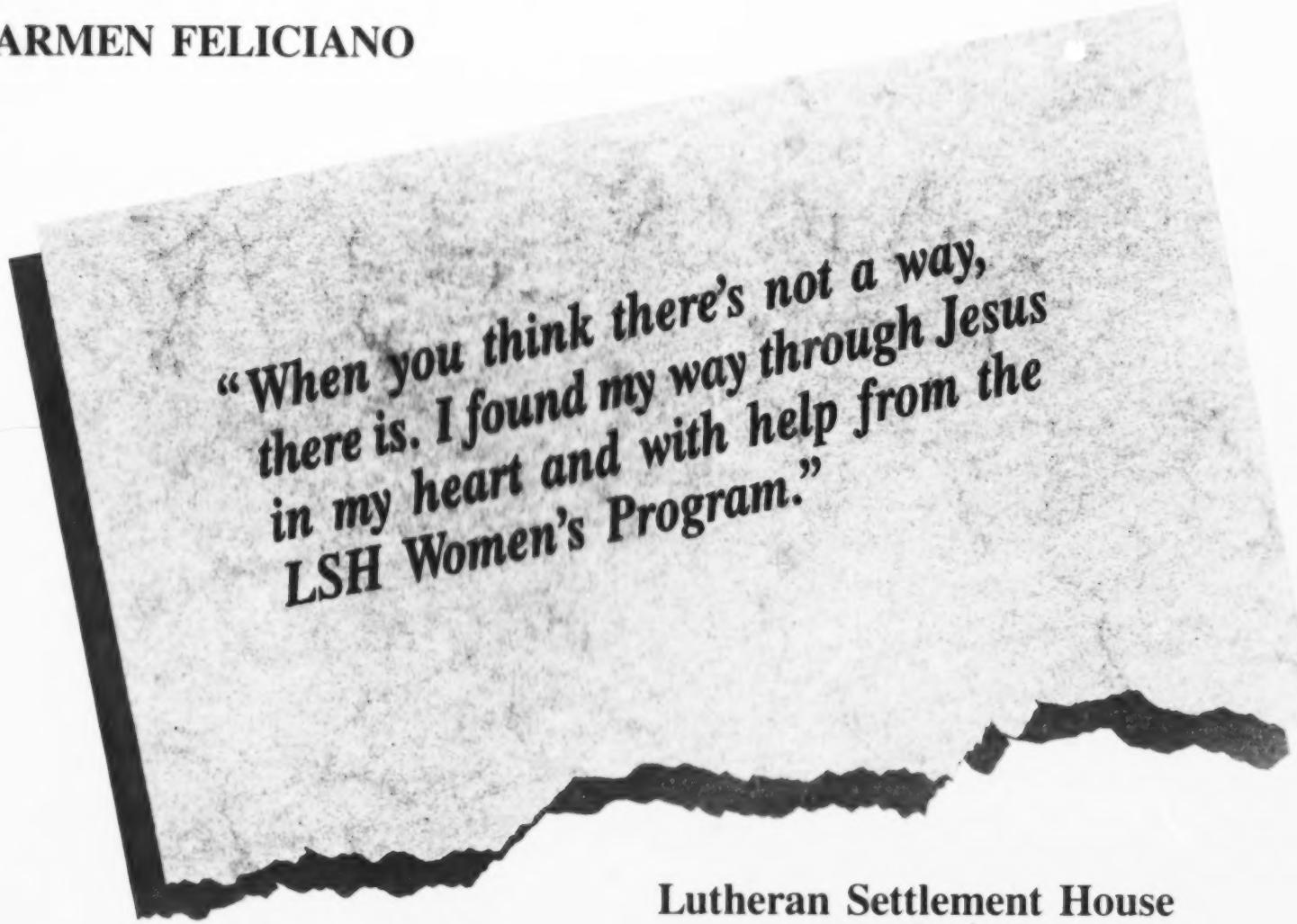
In 1979, Gayle experienced alarming symptoms of weakness, numbness, and clumsiness. Her doctor claimed these stemmed from poor circulation. Not satisfied with this analysis and frightened by intermittent sensory losses, Gayle began reading about neurological diseases and became convinced she had multiple sclerosis. This diagnosis was confirmed in late 1980. Frustrated by MS but refusing to be totally victimized, she has fought the physical and mental lapses which periodically confine her to a wheelchair and limit her vision, memory, speech, reading and writing.

In 1985, she tried to progress in a large GED class but the pace was too strenuous. Fear of failure and grief replaced her determination and stoicism. Only her children were able to pierce her shell of despondency. Then, in 1986, while confined in a rehabilitation facility, Gayle observed the struggle toward independence of other severely disabled people. She became determined to regain some of her own muscle strength and cognitive ability.

Gayle sought out the GED program for visually impaired and disabled students run by the Free Library of Philadelphia. At the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, she was supplied with taped materials and learned new study techniques that strengthened her self confidence. Though initially plagued by anxiety about her ability, she eventually became a thoughtful, sensitive member of the group. She suggested ways to solve problems, was inspiring and encouraging, but never was patronizing.

After graduating in June, 1988, Gayle was hired as a clerk in a major hospital's dialysis unit. She is currently looking forward to taking a computer course in data entry management. Gayle studies music and is the organist at her church. Impressed with her mother's accomplishments, her eleven-year old daughter wrote an award-winning essay honored by Secretary of Education Thomas Gilhool. She believes her actions helped her children stay in school.

CARMEN FELICIANO



Lutheran Settlement House
Women's Program
Sponsor: Carol Goertzel

Carmen Feliciano first appeared at the Lutheran Settlement House (LSH) Women's Program in 1984 with two sharpened pencils, a notebook and her three small children. Louis, who has cerebral palsy, was five at the time, and the twins, David and Daniel, were three. Rejected by another GED program because she "couldn't comprehend enough," she had traveled on two buses to reach the class, afraid all the while that the bus doors would close on one of the children.

This is not the first time, Carmen faced up to danger. A child of New York's inner city, Carmen and her family fled to Newark to escape an abusive father. When her mother started beating the children, Carmen was placed in a foster home. There she attended school regularly for two years. Her education ended when she returned to live with her mother and babysit her brothers and sisters because her mother was frequently drunk and often absent.

At eighteen, when her mother moved without telling the children where she was going, Carmen tried to kill herself. She was taken to the hospital and survived. Only a year later, her brother died playing Russian Roulette, while drunk and high. At nineteen, Carmen moved with her boyfriend to a farm where they worked as laborers picking peppers and tomatoes. When she became pregnant, her boyfriend began abusing her. One day he kicked her in the stomach and she went into labor. Her son went into convulsions right after birth but it was not until much later that he was diagnosed as having cerebral palsy.

When Louis was seven months old, Camen fled this abusive relationship but wound up, pregnant again, with another man who tried to kill her. After her twins were born, Carmen met her husband, who, at that time, was using drugs. She promised to marry him only if he entered a rehabilitation program. Her pastor arranged for a childless couple to watch the children and Carmen joined her husband in the program. She stayed for a year learning how to care for her boys and to know who she was. Her husband came out of the program in 1984 and they were married in 1985. Since then, he has remained drug free.

Four years after she started the LSH Women's program, Carmen is within twelve points of obtaining her GED. She inspires everyone as she comes to class, pushing her oldest son in his wheelchair with her baby in a backpack. She has become a community leader, teaching others to report substandard housing conditions to the authorities, forcing landlords to correct them. After the birth of her fifth child (her last, she says), she plans to complete her GED and become a tutor in the adult program. She has received the Parent of the Year Award from the local Development Center for Handicapped Children.

Left to right, front row; *Theresa Raihl, Lansford Knapp, Beatrice Lee Frealing, Sandra Lawrence.*
Back row; *Carmen Feliciano, Inez Ortiz, Anna Mae Kuchta, Thomas G. Trammell, Gayle Patterson, Charles Lynch, Sr.*

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